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Clinical tips: Exercise

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After over-stuffing our bellies at Christmas gatherings, we vow that we will renew our commitment to exercising more in the New Year.

However, for most people, we know that no matter how much money we invest in our gym memberships, we just can't seem to find the motivation to exercise! We know we should be exercising more; we know about incidental exercises e.g. taking the stairs instead of the elevator; and we know exercise is good for health and wellbeing.

The risks of not exercising is well documented, but, given how time-poor we are nowadays, finding time to fit exercise into our every routine is difficult.

The World Health Organisation recommend adults (18-64 years old) accumulate 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity throughout the week, in intervals of at least 10 minutes in duration. This is increased to 300 minutes per week, or 150 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity for additional health benefits. Moderate-intensity exercises require a moderate amount of effort and noticeably increases the heart rate e.g. brisk walking. In contrast, vigorous-intensity physical activity substantially increases the heart rate and causes rapid breathing e.g. running.

However, in recent years, there have also been warnings about the risk of sitting extended periods of time – and it seems that standing for extended periods of time is no better. It is important to remember that doing 30 minutes of physical activity every day is not a free pass to sit / stand still for rest of the day.

The key seems to be about breaking up the movement and interrupting the extended periods of sitting / standing. As annoying as it seems, if you are sitting all the time, even standing up at least every 30 minutes and having a stretch seems to help. Other activities that have been suggested include:

- Regularly changing posture,
- Stand up when you are using the phone or eating lunch,
- Have walking instead of sitting meetings.

As cliché as it is, small changes can add up quickly – yes even some household chores count! Start with realistic goals and celebrate the small wins. Before you know it you will be well on your way. Procrastinating from exercise might seem to be the easier way out now, but be strict with yourself, because “a year from now, you'll wish you stated today”.